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RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2130  
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 1789  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0182  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0119  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0661  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1197  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0883  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0089  
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0064  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0408  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0554  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0095  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENTIANE 000542

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2016

TAGS: PHUM PREF PREL KIRF LA

SUBJECT: LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ON JOINT DEMARCHE ON HMONG CHILDREN

REF: A. VIENTIANE 500

¶B. VIENTIANE 496

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kristen Bauer, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The like-minded missions and UN will seek to deliver their joint demarche on the missing Hmong children by the end of June, with the UN playing the coordinating role. The group awaits the outcome of a UN coordination meeting to be held tomorrow to determine the timing of the demarche. The demarche comes as concern mounts regarding the fate of the 26 Hmong children; one Hmong source has reported to the UN that one of the incarcerated boys has died, several of the girls are missing and the others are in poor condition. End summary.

State of the Children

¶2. (C) The like-minded group (U.S., Australia, France, Sweden, Germany, Poland, EU, UN Acting Resident Coordinator and UNICEF) met June 14 to discuss developments on the missing Hmong children and plans for delivering a joint demarche (reflets). While there has been little new information over the last month regarding the status of the children, UNICEF reported that the UN Department of Political Affairs had recently received an unsubstantiated report from a source identified as the World Hmong People's Congress, based in New York, that one of the incarcerated boys had died, that the girls had been mistreated and had been shifted frequently between detention facilities in Bolikhamsai and Salavane provinces, and that at least several of the girls were missing.

Going Forward

¶3. (C) The UN, represented by the UNICEF Country Director now serving as the UN's Acting Resident Coordinator, also notified the group that the Lao had not yet responded to the Secretary General's May 18 letter to the Lao President on the

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children; the Lao said they had only received the letter last week, and sources in MFA believed it would take time for the letter to work its way through the system before eliciting a response. The Acting Resident Coordinator noted there was ongoing discussion between UNICEF and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) in New York regarding the timing of the demarche. The two are to meet in New York June 14 to discuss the demarche, with the DPA pushing for a demarche soonest and UNICEF advocating a delay until the Lao had responded to the Secretary General's letter.

¶4. (C) In spite of this potential obstacle to UN participation, the like-minded group agreed that plans to present a joint demarche should go forward as soon as possible. The UN would plan to lead the demarche, assuming the question of timing could be ironed out in New York. The Acting Resident Coordinator will draft a Note Verbal within the week, to be cleared by the group before submission to MFA which will request a meeting between the demarche participants and the newly-appointed Foreign Minister, Thongloun Sisoulith. The note will say that optimum timing for the demarche would be before June 28, when the Acting Resident Coordinator will be leaving Vientiane for several weeks.

¶5. (C) The Australian Ambassador agreed to circulate slightly revised points reflecting some minor corrections. (These have been emailed to the desk.) The group concurred that the points will be left with the GOL at close of the demarche. All parties also agreed that there should be no press and that if asked by the media all would respond with "no comment."

#### Participation

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¶6. (C) Most in the group thought it would take some days for the Lao to decide to grant the meeting, in view of the fact that Thongloun was only coming on board at MFA this week and would need time to read in to his new job. In the meantime, the Australian Ambassador volunteered to coordinate with Bangkok-based missions who have signed on to the demarche, namely the Canadians, UK and possibly New Zealand. The group hoped these countries could participate at the Ambassador level, but in the absence of the Ambassadors lower-level representatives could stand in. Most important was that the Lao see non-Vientiane participation as a signal of the non-resident missions' concern for the children.

¶7. (C) Of the Lao-based representatives, the following have formal approval to participate: Australia, Germany, Sweden, and USA. France has not heard from Paris but will go ahead regardless. The EU will then follow France's lead. Poland too is awaiting a decision but felt empowered to go ahead if nothing was forthcoming from Warsaw. The EU also has yet to make a final determination on their form of representation in the actual meeting\*either by individual country and the commission or by the EU presidency.

#### Comment

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¶8. (C) The joint demarche has proceeded by fits and starts; the diffidence of some of our "like-minded" colleagues worried about making any waves with the Lao has kept progress to a crawl. Even the most timid agree, however, that the time has come to fish or cut bait, especially with the condition of the children now in serious question. Ironically, the last obstacle now appears to be UNICEF. Although UNICEF in Vientiane is ready and willing, according to the Acting Coordinator, the New York headquarters is not fully on-board and doesn't wish to "upset" the Lao.

¶9. (C) Assuming the joint demarche goes forward, we believe that it has two things going for it: first, voicing the

concern of a large segment of the GoL's most important diplomatic relations, it will send an unmistakable message that the Lao can't continue to duck this issue. Second, the recent government changes (including a new President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister) may break the logjam. Both the PM and FM are pragmatists; with no baggage to carry on this issue and no personal stake (unlike departing FM Somsavat), they may be more amenable to setting the children free and ridding themselves of this vexing problem. End comment.

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